

design anthology

UK EDITION

INTERIORS / ART / ARCHITECTURE / TRAVEL / STYLE

UK£12 designanthologyuk.com



ISSUE 20

Time shifts

A family villa in Potsdam that keeps evolving
in the hands of designer Gisbert Pöpler

Words / Giovanna Dunmall

Images / Thomas Heimann







Berlin-based designer Gisbert Pöpler has been working on the interiors of a large family villa overlooking a lake outside Berlin in the district of Potsdam for almost six years. “The villa is a second home but the owners are there a lot,” he explains. “At first it was just the parents and daughters, but now the daughters have had children, so it’s three generations who spend time together in the house.” What started as a project where “the client had no clear vision of what they wanted as they didn’t know how they would use the house” has, over time, evolved with the family’s changing needs to become a project with an eclectic but defined spirit and soul; a project where the client has grown in confidence but is also receptive to the studio’s sometimes whimsical suggestions.

The villa itself dates from 1904 and was initially built by a Berlin family of brewers in the Heimatstil, an ornate but domestic style that responded to the growing industrialisation and urbanisation by favouring regional traditions and craftsmanship as well as natural materials. Many of the original features were lost over time as the home was a kindergarten for several decades. “Many of these big houses in what was formerly East Germany were used as hospitals or kindergartens,” Pöpler explains. However, in this case the house’s previous owner had already renovated, so it was in good shape when his client bought it. “She is the one who put in – or back – many of the fireplaces, which are vintage pieces she bought in England,” he says. A few original features remain, such as the main fireplace in the central

salon, with its tiles featuring hop plants, in honour of the home’s first owners’ profession.

Pöpler and his team were initially hired to oversee the colour concept as well as the lighting and furniture choices, but have ended up doing much more. “The home was already filled with blue and green tones when we arrived but we made these stronger and more articulated,” explains Pöpler. “It’s quite an imposing and heavy house, so it needed bolder colours and more layers.”

Furniture-wise, their first task was to tackle the imposing central salon. Its grand fireplace and eight-metre-high ceilings make it a space where furniture could easily be dwarfed by the sheer volume of the room. The architects chose a playful, rounded and squashy fabric-covered sofa and armchair designed by the studio, combined with a Toro armchair by Azucena; together they manage to strike that balance between family-friendliness and elegance. The room’s *pièce de résistance* is undoubtedly a large central rug, made by Tai Ping to the studio’s own design. It features abstract echoes of flowers, the lake out front and the red and blue hues of the stained-glass details on the salon’s large windows, which are an original feature. The sun and natural light create further playful ribbons of colour and dappled light on the carpet and elsewhere, as they filter through the window into the room.

The kitchen is another space that the design team spent a great deal of time on. Airy and

Previous page
The vast central
salon of a lakeside
villa by Gisbert
Pöpler, a project
several years in
the making –
and still ongoing

Facing page
Inspired by the
lake and the
ribbons of colour
on the stained
glass, the rug was
made by Tai Ping
to Pöpler’s design





Left
In the study overlooking the lake,
Artemide's Alfa table lamp sits on
a Faba oak desk that's part of the
designer's own portfolio of furniture

bright with glazing in three directions and direct access to a terrace and stairs down to the garden, here the walls were painted in a turmeric yellow (Pöpler calls it “curry” colour).

There’s now a trestle-like kitchen island with a marble top, a roomy built-in daybed in front of the window and a circular dining table. The latter is a striking vintage piece by Mario Ceroli: “He’s a fantastic Italian artist and sculptor who worked with this rough Russian pine in the 1970s,” says Pöpler. “He made some strange and wonderful pieces, beds and tables... there’s a famous picture of him wearing wooden wings like an angel.” The table has a compass design on the top and a sculpted geometric base that looks solid but is made of individual pieces of wood. “I told the clients ‘this is the table you need in your kitchen’ and they had big doubts, but now they love it.”

Above the kitchen table is a Grappolo ceiling light from the 1950s designed by Luigi Caccia Dominioni for Azucena, one of many pieces by the iconic Milanese brand (Pöpler’s favourite) here. “The nice thing with this family is they are open to working with manufacturers and picking or commissioning pieces that are quite unique,” he says. “They really appreciate good quality and craftsmanship.”

One such finely crafted piece is the bedspread in the main bedroom, which is designed by Pöpler’s studio. “We make our bedspreads with the company that does all the Hermès cashmere and this bedspread is hand-dyed,

hand-woven and double faced,” he says. At more than three metres long and wide, a special loom had to be created to make it.

Elsewhere, the client was happy to be patient if it meant finding the perfect piece in the end. The overhead chandelier in the main salon, for instance, a geometric 1960s chandelier in red painted metal that used to hang in a Venetian hotel, took the design team several years to find. “It’s a big piece, but it’s not dominant,” says Pöpler. “And that, of course, was the challenge for the room. You can’t have something too dominant because of the lake outside, which is already very prominent, but the room needed more light. It took us six years to find the right piece!”

The project isn’t about to end any time soon, which isn’t unusual for the studio, says Pöpler. “We have quite a few families we have worked with over two generations already; we start with the parents and then the children build their own homes.” Next up for the villa is the renovation of the second kitchen on the ground floor or basement (depending on whether you’re looking at it from the waterfront side or not) and the creation of another “room” that will provide easier access to the garden and water. “It’s a space under the main terrace that is open at the moment, where we plan to put in walls and windows,” says Pöpler. “It will be very popular in the summertime, because you can just open the door and walk out into the garden and straight into the lake.” This villa’s transformation is discreet but ongoing.

Facing page
It took several
years to source the
perfect lighting
for the salon – a
1960s piece that
used to hang in
a Venetian hotel







Facing page
Sunny turmeric yellow was chosen for
the open-plan kitchen-dining room

Above
A sculptural Mario Ceroli dining table,
surrounded by classic Campanino chairs

“The nice thing with this family is that they are open to picking or commissioning pieces that are quite unique. They really appreciate good quality and craftsmanship”





Facing page
The bedroom's generous curtains (in Dedar's Tiger Mountain fabric) extend around the walls, with a cashmere bedspread further adding to the tactility

Above
Tuuci parasols add contrasting colour to the greenery of the lakeside terrace